

[John H. Robertson]

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Folklore, —White Pioneers

Miss Effie Cowan, P.W.

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Interview with Mr John H. Robertson, White Pioneer, Marlin, Texas.

"I was born near Quincy , Florida , on March 31st, 1845. I was a soldier in the Confederate Army and served under Maury's division of the Army of Tennessee. I was captured at the battle of Gettysburg in Longstreets Longstreet's charge and was taken to ort Deleware Fort Delaware , an island of 90 acres of land where the Union prisners prisoners were kept. We were detailed to work in the fields and our rations was corn bread and pickled beef. However I fared better than some of the prisners prisoners for I was given the privilege of making jewelry for the use of the Union soldiers. I made rings from the buttons from their overcoats and when they were polished the brass made very nice looking rings. These I sold to the soldiers of the Union Army who were our guards and with the money

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thus obtained I could buy food and clothing. The Union uards guards kept a ommisary commissary and they had a big supply of chocolate. I ate chocolate / candy and drank hot chocolate in place of coffee until I have never wanted ny any chocolate since.

"I was in this prison when Lincoln was killed and great was the orrow sorrow among the troops who guarded us when the news came. I made an attempt one time to escape and was capture , so did not make another attempt. This was during a storm and in the confusion I tried to roll out of the camp, it came up while we were asleep and I was sleeping in my blanket, but the guard heard me and caught me before I could make my escape. After the end of the conflict I returned home, found C.12 - 2/11/41 - Texas 2 that I had been reported missing for two years and had changed so much that my own people did not know me. When I left home I was sixteen and during the period of my absence I had grown and completely changed. Finally my sister identified me by my teeth. During this time I had grown a beard and this alne alone changed my appearance.

"At the end of hostilities I returned to my home and lived there for five years and as so many were seeking their fortune in the state of Texas I left my home in Florida and came to Texas in 1870. I landed at the little town then of Galveston and from there came over the new railroad, the Houston and Texas Central, which had just been completed , on to the little city of Waco, Texas. I met Col. Gurley who owned a plantation in the Brazos bottom and hired to him as manager of this plantation. He also owned a saw mill and I operated it.

"I also managed another plantation owned by a Mr Bryant who had brought his slaves with him to Texas before they were freed, they remained with him and there were around a hundred. I did not have any trouble with them as they were peaceful and easily managed. After I spent some time on these plantations I married Miss Pitts and we had one daughter. er Her youngest child married Howard Hunnicutt of Marlin, Texas, with whom I make my home , since the death of my wife in 1931. For twenty years I was a member of the city coommission of Marlin, Texas, and during this time there was a number

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of changes. The cattle thieves were plentiful and after some time the law was allowed to take its course, but for a time after the reconstruction days there were Vigilant societies who took the law into their hands for the citizens' protection . 3 "I remember there was a man by the name of Grundy accused of stealing cattle, the vigilants or perhaps some others (I can't be accurate) decided to take the law into their hands and he was hung to a large elm tree which is still standing in the city of Marlin today. He used to drive a gentle old horse to a one seated buggy and after he was done away with , his widow drove this same horse to this buggy to town. Some mischievous boys decided to play a prank on her and so they would tie a rope , the distance from the church to the tree , to be sure when the horse reached the tree he would stop. Which he did, much to the surprise and anger when the widow found out the cause : ; That that it was a the boy's prank , instead of the ghost of her departed husband. " It was while I was a member of the city commission of Marlin that the hot wells were discovered. We were drilling for city water and when the water came in it was hot. For a time it was piped to the residence section, and great were the complaints and abuses which we received from these residents who wanted water for domestic purposes . Finally we had the hot water analyzed and when it was found to have medicinal qualities it was then changed from the residences and used for this purpose. The boring of this hot well cost the city 30,000 dollars, but was bought up by private capital. The present health resort was the outcome of our drilling for water. The city now use's lake water.

"When I first came to the Brazos bottom the section [?] is now known as the Golinda, Chilton and Satin communities. where I settled. They were west of Marlin some ten to fourteen miles. The country was a vast area of timber and grass land with the plantations near the river. 4 " The area extending from these communities to the river was dense woods with the exceptions of the clearing for the plantations. They These were huge old trees, elm, oak , ash, willow [?] , cedar and other's. There were a few winding roads in this area and there were deer, wildcat and bear [?] in the thickets. There was a famous place near our community called Buck-head Stand, named for the number of deer that

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were killed here and their heads thrown away, hence the name of Buck—head Stand". In at the time I was manager of the saw-mill for Col. Gurley in the 70's I could almost any day kill any number of deer they came so near the clearing's clearings.

"The section where Chilton and Golinda were situated was not so dense with timber as it was more mostly on a prairie. All the section west of the Brazos river from Marlin tho' was a vast wilderness comparatively speaking. Some of the earliest families who helped to build up these communities lived not only at Golinda but over across the McLennan County line at Lorena, these were the Westbrooks, the Gurleys who lived at Golinda also the Duty's at Golinda, the Gaines of Chilton and Vic and Will Walker , later residents of the community of Satin when it was born , on the spot where they lived. There was the Gus Meisner family, the Meisner Wells was a well known spot in the early days. Because as the name implies an inexhaustible well offered a good supply of water for the community in the days when the drouths hit it.

"This famous well was on the edge of the cedar brakes. This cedar was famous because at one time the choicest and most abundant cedar in the State of Texas was found here. As the years passed this cedar was cut 5 and made into pencils, cedar piling and cedar lumber. The old Meisner log home stood for many years after this cedar was gone. They did not know the art of conservation which the government is now seeking to save such rich heritage of the land. A few years ago another house was built in which the Wess Lewis family now live, on the old Meisner home Stead

"In early days a large amount of the land near the Brazos river was owned by a man of English descent, named Captain E.G. Hanrick. He was a citizen of this country and title of his land was clear. But he had no heirs in this country. It seems that he became aware of the fact that his sons or relations in Englad who were citizens of England, might encounter difficulties in establishing their right to the title of this land as an inheritance. The Alien Land Laws standing in their way, so before his death Col. Gurley acquired a partnership

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in part of the land. Later he became the sole owner. It came to be known as the Gurley ranch.

“In the meantime a kinsman of Captain Hanrick, Ned Hanrick, came from England, hoping to establish claim to the land in event of the Captains Captain's death. Captain Hanrick died. Title to the land was cloed clouded because of the alien land laws. (which revents prevents aliens from inheriting property in the United States.) The finest legal talent in Falls and surrounding counties fought to clear the title to this / land. It was called the “Hanrick versus Hanrick suit “ , in which the late L.W. Goodrich and B.B. Clarkson and others at Marlin worked for many years (from 1871 to 1919) to untangle. Title / was finally established and the land was distributed too numr to a number of people. 6 “All the land was not Hanrick land but part of it was finally absorbed thro' transactions by the following men. Mose Westbrook of Golinda Col. Gurley, Sanger Brothers of Waco, the late J.T. davis of Waco and Goodrich and Clarkson of Marlin. ther Other land nearby became the property of other men including the Guderians, Wittners, Wooleys, Duty's Jackson, and Hatch, Evans and Gaines families.

“The earliest information I have of the first family in this section was the Duty family. This family came to Falls county from East Texas in 1849 and it is said there was not another family living between the Brazos river between Marlin (Marlin was created in 1850) and the west side of the river in this community. Mr Duty often related how the Indians were in and out of the vecinity (but were friendly Indians) on their way to the Torrey borthers (later Barnards) trading post above or east of Waco on the Tehuacana. Buffalo had not all left this section. There were herds of Deer, wild horses, cattle and antelope which made their home near the Brazos river , as late as the 0' 70's, when I came. Many of these wild animals were still here.

“Mr Duty's home was built of post oak logs and the floor was of split puncheon. It was still standing in the early 90's. Still farther back , so the local history goes , in 1851 Gilbert

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Jackson erected the first mill in this area of Falls county at what was called Shake Rag, now known as Rock Dam, this was east from the Duty home.

“From the Jackson family came what is known as the Jackson Lake, a large section of land of three or four hundred acres, at that time filled with 7 water and became a favorite camping and fishing place for the communities surrounding it. Young men built a dancing pavillion where the young people made merry and the candidates did their part in making things , at least interesting , if not merry. Finally a private club was formed in the later days and it became a recreational spot for only those who help membership. The passing of time and the erosion and changes made by the Brazos river erased this lake and it was filled with soil from the flood of 1913 and today is a fertile farm owned by J.E. Thigpen and Robert Goelzer of Chilton, Texas.

“There were two other families who came soon after the Duty's, they were with the Duty's, those of Joe Salmon and E.H. Hatch, for many years these families formed the principal settlement on the Waco-Marlin road centering about Golinda. They were stock-men on an extensive scale and helped to bring others to the settlement. Henry Duty died in 1876, but his son carried on in place of his father and was a veteran of the Civil War.

“In 1866 the late Col. W.D. Gaines, father of Spinks Gaines of Chilton and his brother Captian D.Y. Gaines owned farms which were cleared from the timber land near the Brazos river in the vecinity of Golinda, where I lived. The lowland hemmed in by dene dense woods , and the mosquitoes caused sickness, so he moved higher up on the prairie near the town of Chilton. It was then more better known as Carolina. The J.B. Evans family lived some few miles nearer the river at the place known as Shake Rag, at that time the river flowed farther west having changed its course about 1900. Mr Evans was an example of the hardy pioneer's fighting spirit and it was 8 the community impression that he had fought a few duels in and around the settlement.

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"Col. Gurley maintained a home for awhile in the late seventies, or early eighties , near the present town of Satin where Will Walker lives today. This was before the name of Satin was thought of, before the coming of the San Antonio and Aransas Pass railroad which was built thro' the communities I have mentioned. Col. Gurley was an eminent lawyer and had lived at Waco specializing in land titles and civil law practice. He was a Confederate veteran, hence his title of Colonel. Before his death he was head of a company organized to manufacture a mechanical cotton picking machine / which he needed for his extensive farm in the Brazos valley [?] But he was not successful in this and so he had to keep the negro labor, just as he had when I was his manager.

"Col. Gurley had much influence it was said in the building of the San Antonio and Aransas Pas road thro' this community. It was claimed by his friends that the many twists and turns in the vecinity of the present town of Satin was to accomdate accommodate him by the railroad weaving about advantageously to his farms. Dave Gurley and Bob ross Ross were the main builders of the road bed, cutting up the timber and throwing up the road bed, they were part of the firm of Gurley, Ross and Gurley, which contracted with the railroad to throw up the road bed. Their head quarters were at Waco.

"Before the turn of the century Col. Gurley passed on and his son, John Gurley continued the work began by his father so many years before. J.T. Davis of Waco acquired an interest in the Gurley ranch and after he passed on, his son, J. Lee Davis of Waco not only continued farming according 9 to modern methods, but recently interested himself in the production of oil on the land. Under his direction a number of producing wells were drilled and the foundation laid for more oil development. This in the section where once was densely wooded land. Many facts were buried with the early days of this section , with the pioneers who wrought well and passed on.

"Rapid changes have taken place in this as in the other communities of Central Texas, as well as other section of the state. Nowhere down the long corridor of time s has these changes been so miaculous miraculous as in the last fifty years here. So, like magic , rose

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from the wilderness of the Brazos bottom, from the wild cat thicket and the wooded timber of the low-lands, from the rich alluvial land of the river section , rivalled only in the early days by the valley of the Nile, the progressive towns west of the Brazos as well as those to the east have become steady and continues in their contribution to the world of industry and civilization.

“In this brief sketch I have failed to mention some who also helped in the upbuilding of this section. There was ohnny Johnny Vickers who came in 1887 to help clear the cedar brakes for a lumber firm, and Wallace Hunter came to Golinda about the same time. Both families / have descendants still here. There were the Ruble families, R.E. and Mayor R.G. Ruble of Lott, whose grand father was one of the first settlers also. All have left a heritage rich in folklore of the early days of the Brazos vecinity, and he the river of Central Texas, known in the days of the Indians as “Brazos de dois Dios ”. (Arms of God.).